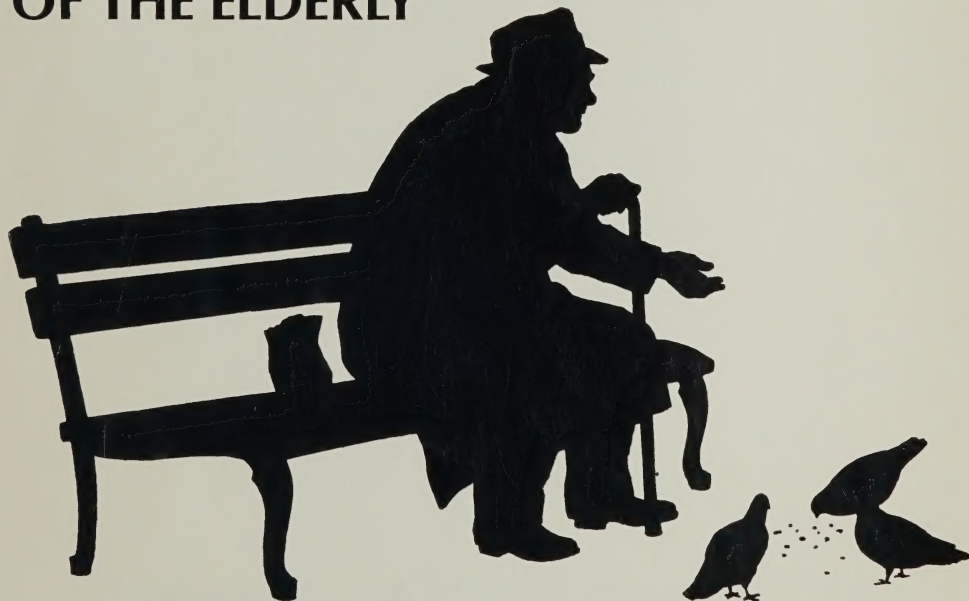


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ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY



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ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

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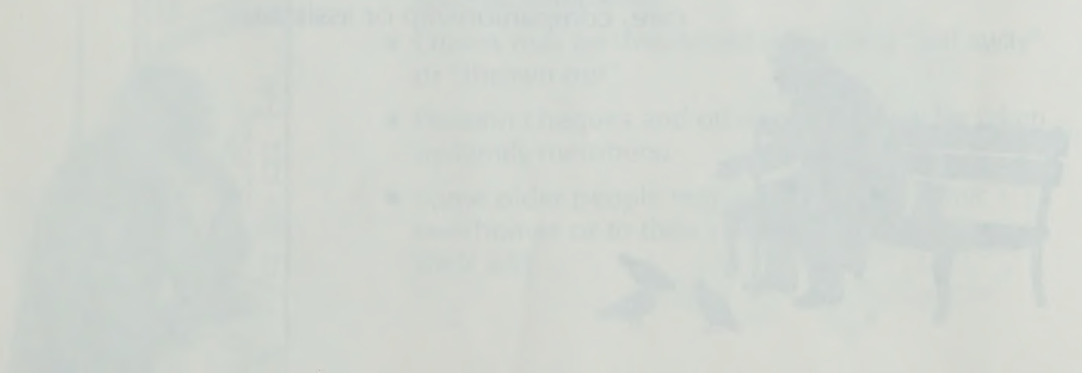
**Prepared by the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
in cooperation with the Manitoba Association on Gerontology
1986**



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

THE PROBLEM

Although the abuse and neglect of elderly persons is not a new problem, it has existed up until now in relative isolation and obscurity. Only recently has society begun to recognize the full extent of the problem and in turn begun to take some positive steps towards its amelioration.



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

THE DEFINITION

WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE AND ELDER NEGLECT?

Elder Abuse: may include the infliction of physical injury, restraint, financial exploitation, threats, ridicule, insult or humiliation, forced isolation (physical or social), or forced change in living arrangement.

Elder Neglect: is the refusal or failure to care for the older person whether intentional or unintentional (i.e., laziness or inadequate knowledge). This could include abandonment, withholding or non-provision of food, health care, companionship or assistance.

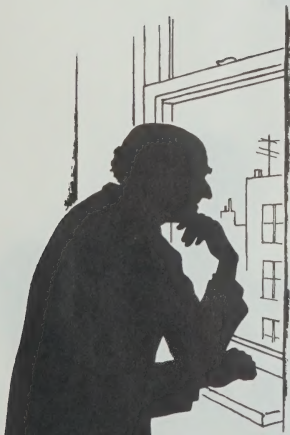


ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHAT IS ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

ABUSE USUALLY HAS A CHRONIC
REPETITIVE PATTERN

- Some abused or neglected persons are found to be malnourished or dehydrated.
- Some are beaten causing bruises, welts, fractures or even death.
- Personal hygiene may be ignored.
- Some may even be given drugs to keep them more "manageable"; others may have essential medications withheld.
- Some may be subjected to name calling or ignored completely.
- Others may be threatened with being "put away" or "thrown out".
- Pension cheques and other monies may be taken by family members.
- Some older people may be confined to their own homes or to their own bedrooms against their will.



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHO ARE THE ABUSED?

Although *any* person may be abused, the majority of the elderly abused are:

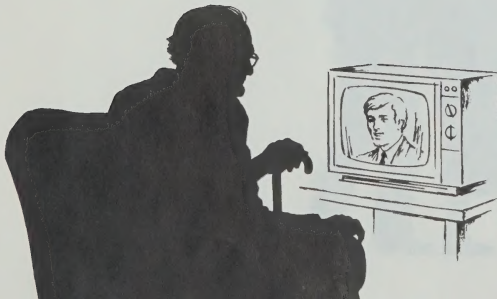
- females over the age of 75;
- frail with physical and/or mental disabilities;
- often unable to provide for their own needs including their own protection;
- living with their abusers; and
- frequently reluctant or unwilling to report that abuse has actually occurred.



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

Why are older people frequently reluctant or unwilling to report that abuse has occurred? Some of the factors affecting their decision may include:

- lack of alternatives for shelter;
- fear of being abandoned, or placed in a nursing home;
- lack of support services;
- fear of reprisal;
- desire to avoid shame and embarrassment; and
- the shame of having raised a child who abuses them.



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHY DOES ABUSE OCCUR?

Although there is probably no single cause for the abuse of older people, many researchers feel that environmental and/or personal stresses may help trigger an abusive situation. It is important to realize therefore, that the person who abuses requires help too.



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

CAUSAL FACTORS

There are three basic theories of abuse:

- *The Pathological Framework*: views abusive behaviour as being determined solely by the personal or pathological problems of the abuser. Alcoholism, drug abuse, schizophrenia, and sociopathic behaviour all fall under this category as possible explanations for elder abuse.
- *The Environmental Framework*: views present situations and social conditions as being determinant of abusive behaviour.
- *The Development Framework*: views domestic violence as a learned behaviour which is passed on from generation to generation through established behaviour patterns.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

IS IT ABUSE?

Although elder abuse is often difficult to diagnose, a combination of any of the following *may* indicate that abuse exists:

- the elderly person's hygiene is poor;
- his/her clothing may be torn, in disarray, or perhaps soiled;
- he/she is often left alone or isolated;
- there appears to be a lack of proper supervision;
- he/she has untreated sores or injuries;
- there is little or no affect or communication between the elderly person and his/her caregiver;
- there appears to be a lot of stress in the caregiver's environment.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHY DOES ABUSE OCCUR?

OUR CHANGING SOCIETY CREATES MANY
STRESSES FOR THE FAMILY

Caregivers for the elderly often have multiple roles to fill while looking after their aging parents. Aside from looking after the elderly, there may be young dependent children in the family who require care as well. These caring functions are often left for the wife to perform. Contemporary women find that they are juggling the demands of full or part-time careers, growing families and aging parents.

It has also been shown that many caregivers are themselves approaching old age and are therefore themselves more likely to be suffering from failing mobility which makes caring for an elderly parent more difficult.

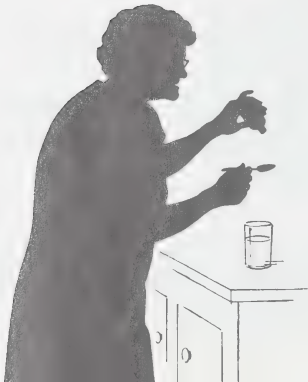
Unless dealt with effectively, such stresses can continue to build inside the caregiver until they explode into an abusive situation.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHY DOES ABUSE OCCUR?

THE ATTITUDES OF SOCIETY HAVE EFFECTS ON ELDERLY PEOPLE AND THE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THEM

Often when people grow older they are thought of in negative terms; as being sick and feeble, forgetful, confused, dependent, and as being at the end of their productive years. Once we begin thinking of the elderly in such negative terms however, their mistreatment becomes more easily facilitated. It becomes easier for us to ignore the needs or requirements of the older person.

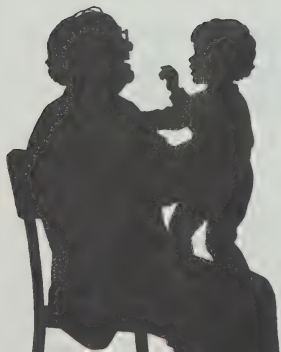


ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT ABUSE AND NEGLECT

In order to help remedy the problems of abuse, it is necessary to concentrate our efforts in a few basic areas. First of all we must strive to help reduce the stresses within families looking after an elderly person. Counselling and support services for the families and for the victims must be made easily accessible. Secondly, it is important to educate the public about elder abuse so that they may acknowledge that the problem *does* exist and ultimately be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse. In this way the elderly themselves will also feel less hesitant in reporting cases of maltreatment. Finally, legislation is suggested in order to provide for a system of mandatory reporting for elder abuse cases, with the added assurance of protection for the person reporting the abuse.

Only in these ways can we begin to effectively deal with the problems of elder abuse.



ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF THE ELDERLY

WHAT CAN *YOU* DO ABOUT ABUSE?

First of all, you can *LISTEN*. Offer your support, encouragement and company to the aged person. Be a volunteer and help the elderly and their caregivers. Secondly, *TALK* about abuse to your school teachers, to the police, to your neighbours, to parents, to social workers, or to doctors and nurses. Finally, *TAKE ACTION*. Be aware of your community resources so that you can direct the aged person and his/her caregiver to helpful programs. Each community has services for caregivers and older persons in need of help. Many people believe that what happens in someone else's family is none of their business. Decide that you care enough to help your neighbour get the help that he or she needs.

If you are an older person or a caregiver *REACH OUT* for help. The pressures of today are not easy for anyone; *YOU AREN'T ALONE* in your difficulties.



